



# PRESS RELEASE

## Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

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Contact: \*CI-HQ-COMMUNICATIONSEDUCATION@ci.irs.gov  
IRS – Criminal Investigation

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### **Former Bank Teller Sentenced to Prison for Cashing Fraudulently Obtained Tax Refund Checks**

*Cashed More Than 360 Checks Totaling More Than \$780,000*

A Columbus, Georgia, resident was sentenced today to 18 months in prison for her role in a stolen identity refund fraud conspiracy, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciraolo of the Justice Department's Tax Division and Acting U.S. Attorney G.F. Peterman, III for the Middle District of Georgia.

According to court documents, between February 2013 and May 2014, Vicky Wheeler, 55, worked as a bank teller at a SunTrust Bank branch in Columbus. Wheeler was approached by several co-conspirators who wanted her to cash fraudulently obtained tax refund checks in exchange for a fee. Wheeler was informed that the tax refund checks were generated from tax returns filed using stolen identities. To disguise the fraudulent nature of the checks, Wheeler made false entries on the face of the checks to make it appear as if she received identification when the checks were cashed. Wheeler never received any forms of identification. In total, Wheeler received and cashed approximately 361 fraudulent tax refund checks, including U.S. Treasury checks and tax refund checks issued by financial institutions that claimed \$780,760.17 in tax refunds.

"The prosecution of stolen identity refund crimes remains a top priority of the department," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciraolo. "These cases are not limited to those individuals who file fictitious tax returns. We will vigorously pursue participants at all levels of these schemes, including those who steal identities and those who, like Ms. Wheeler, assist in cashing the refund checks that result from the fraud."

"Stolen identity refund fraud results in major loss of revenue to the United States Government," said Special Agent in Charge Veronica F. Hyman-Pillot of the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI). "Vicky Wheeler abused her position of trust and allowed greed and deceit to fuel criminal behavior. Today she is being held accountable for her actions. Her prison sentence and restitution order should send a message that refund fraud, greed, and deceit does not pay off in the end."

In addition to the prison term, U.S. District Judge Clay D. Land ordered Wheeler to serve three years of supervised release and pay restitution in the amount of \$780,760.17.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciruolo and Acting U.S. Attorney Peterman commended special agents of IRS-CI and the U.S. Secret Service, who investigated the case and Trial Attorney Michael C. Boteler of the Tax Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Crawford L. Seals of the Middle District of Georgia, who prosecuted the case.

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